

# Montana Farm to School Success Story

## Packs for Panthers

The students at Boulder Elementary School, otherwise known as the Panthers, couldn't be in better hands. In a district where free and reduced price lunch eligibility is 68%, the school has taken measures to assure that all kids are receiving the healthy food they need, to make the most of the excellent education they are being offered. We all know what it is like to feel hungry on occasion; learning becomes impossible when all you can think about is food. Students need *brain food*, and that is exactly what Boulder Elementary is serving up. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center, run by Rochelle Hesford, at Boulder Elementary, has been helping to connect kids to their food, through their community garden, for the past 10 years. The children learn to plant, tend and harvest produce as well as to cook and eat it. Their afterschool snacks and summer lunches are in part, supplied by the garden's bounty. Over the past 2 years, with the help of National FoodCorps Member, Camille McGovern, these garden vegetables have been finding their way into the students' lunches and school snacks. In the expert hands of the new Food Service Director and noted local restaurateur, Lisa Giulio, the children enjoy kale salads, coleslaw and pesto made from garden produce, in their school lunches, and Camille has helped start up the Fresh Fruit and Veggie Program, which exposes the kids to local produce from around the State.



Boulder Elementary is thinking outside the box when it comes to making sure their students are taken care of. They have partnered with the Gallatin Valley Food Bank to send home packages full of food for weekend meals, with their students. They employed a unique approach so as to reduce the stigma attached to receiving the packs and to ensure all students in need would be getting one. They decided to make the packs available for all their students, and allow them to opt-out of the offering, rather than requiring them to opt-in.

It has been a great success, currently, 133 out of 183, or 72.6% of their student body, are receiving weekend food packs; a number that closely aligns to their free and reduced percentages. Not enough? Children participating in the afterschool program or volunteering in the garden, can take home produce to their families during harvest season, and other community members have access to their fresh vegetables every Thursday at the Farmer's Market, where students learn business skills and help to subsidize participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Programs, for those who would otherwise not be able to partake. None of this could have been accomplished without the strong support of the community and school leadership. Boulder is a great example of what people can do by working together and investing in their greatest assets, the children. Nicely done Boulder!

~Cassie Drynan, MDI Intern